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This paper considers such contracted forms as "I'm," "he's," "we'd," and "isn't" or "won't." It is often assumed, the author states, that every contracted form is derived by surface-level phonological rules from a non-contracted and semantically equivalent counterpart. The author presents evidence to suggest that these assumptions are not justified and that, in fact, "contractions and their related uncontracted counterparts may have different derivational histories, different semantic contents, and different syntactic functions." It is also suggested that "contractions may really be the underlying forms of the language from which the uncontracted forms are derived and that many common opinions about and attitudes toward contractions are traceable to orthographic conventions." (JD)

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THE INDEPENDENCE OF CONTRACTIONS

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In this paper attention will be centered on those contractions which are frequently recognized in a conventional way in the written language. There are two main groups, the first of which can be called the nominal-and-auxiliary type, which is broadly subdivided into three kinds. First, when a nominal, especially a pronoun, is followed by a form of the verb be beginning with a vowel, the vowel is dropped; so we have I'm and I am, he's and he is, and so forth. Second, when a nominal is followed by will or would, will is represented by 'll and would by 'd. Third, when anominal is followed by some form of have and that form of have is the first element of a verb phrase, the ha-is omitted and indicated by an apostrophe in the written language. No contraction takes place if the form of be, will or have occupies final position; e.g., Yes, I am cannot be contracted.

The second main type of contraction occurs in negative verb phrases in which some form of be, have or do or a modal like can, must, should, would or ought is followed by not. In this case a phonological change and shifting takes place which is represented

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by -n't suffixed to the verb form. The verb form am represents a problem here, since the contraction ain't is considered sub-standard and no alternative is widely accepted in America.

Several assumptions are commonly--often tacitly--made about contractions. It is assumed, for example, that for every contraction there is a non-contracted equivalent which fits into the same syntactic niche. The second common assumption is that contractions are semantically equivalent to their uncontracted counterparts and that situational criteria or levels of usage are what determine the choice between contracted and uncontracted forms. Finally, it is vaguely assumed that contractions are derived from uncontracted primary forms through the application of surface-level phonological rules which tend to shorten the expression in question.

Like most assumptions, these have a certain plausibility, but they are essentially superficial observations which weaken under close examination.

Why, for example, should it be assumed that contractions are--as the term implies--derived from uncontracted forms? Why not assume that what are called "uncontracted forms" are really "expansions" of the primary forms of the spoken language? or that uncontracted forms in writing are conventional representations for the spoken contractions? In volume V of A Modern English Grammar Jespersen notes that Shakespeare's prosody reveals numerous contractions which are not spelled out in the written

line. The same is certainly true of may other poets whose verse carries the accents of living speech. This raises the interesting but unanswerable question of just how much our present assumptions about contractions have been influenced by the schoolmaster's veneration of the printed text.

Leaving aside the question of which came first--the contraction or the expansion--let's examine the idea that for every contraction there is a longer, phonologically related expression which is not contracted. This works out for nominal-and-auxiliary type contractions: We have I'm and I am, he's and he is, it's and it is. The variation between voiced and voiceless -s in the last example is phonetically regular, so it offers no problem. When we turn to negative contractions, however, we have a different situation. Notice that has not and hasn't both have two syllables. Going from oneto the other we change and alter the relative positions of phonemes and--what is perhaps most important--we change the stress pattern. But we don't shorten the expression in any obvious way by using the "contraction".

The phonological relationship between has not and hasn't is parallel to that between is not and isn't, were not and weren't, does not and doesn't, and so forth. This seems to argue in favor of the assumption that there is a regular phonological and morphological relationship between contracted and uncontracted expressions. But we don't say willn't for will not: we say won't. And to account for won't we have to go back to the Middle English wol, a dialect

variant of wil. So will not and won't have different derivational histories; they can't be included under the phonological process which related has not to hasn't.

Won't isn't the only contraction with a mind of its own. Why do we say /duw, downt/ instead of the more elegant /duw, duwnt/? People disagree about this, but one very attractive explanation is the great vowel shift. Our linguistic ancestors used to say /dow, downt/; at some point between Chaucer and us /ow/regularly shifted to /uw/ as in do, but the /ow/ in don't stuck to its old ways. As a result, do not and don't have different phonological histories.

Other data could be examined to challenge the theory of alternating contracted and uncontracted forms related by regular phonomorphological processes. If we say wasn't, why don't we say amn't and avoid all that bother about ain't? And how are we to explain the phonological shifts in the modal can in sentences like I can tell, I cannot tell, I can't tell?

The examples given so far show that, phonologically and morphologically at least, contractions may be derived independently of the uncontracted forms they are thought to be variants of. The next step is to show that contractions are not always semantically equivalent to uncontracted expressions which seem similar. Many of you will recall immediately the distinction between let's and let us. Imagine that a fourth-grade teacher has her best pupils divided into two teams to help her with various classroom chores. At the end of the week Miss Jones is going to have one of the teams wash the blackboards, a job they all like. As she is trying

to decide which team to choose, the youngsters wave their hands and plead Let us do it, teacher, please! in contrast to Let's wash the blackboard.

Earlier the importance of stress in dealing with the subject of contractions was mentioned. The importance is semantic. In a colloquial situation, when a speaker chooses to use an uncontracted alternative, he most often does so because he wants to use the auxiliary or the negative adverb as a stress carrier. Compare these two groups of sentences:

I. I'll see him tomorrow.
You'll be there by nine o'clock.
Gladys didn't return the book.
I'm going out.

II. I will see him tomorrow.
You will report to Captain Brinkley at 800 hours.
Gladys did not return the book.
I am going out tonight.

The sentences of the second group obviously have argumentative or authoritative meanings absent from the sentences in the first group. It may be objected that the stress and not the use of the uncontracted form is the significant element. This would imply that the two factors are separable. My point is that they are not, that in colloquial situations uninfluenced by rhetorical or literary considerations native speakers of English regularly use contractions when these are available. It is true that unstressed, uncontracted forms occur, but normally we do not say I am going out,

He has not called yet, We will see you tomorrow. And young George Washington would seem much more plausible if he had said I can't tell a lie, Pop!

The third and final point of this paper is that some contractions fill syntactic slots which are not adequately filled by their uncontracted relatives. In fact, it's sometimes hard to identify these relatives. In the sentence He's gone, is He's equivalent to He has or He is? It doesn't really matter, because we can say They've gone or They're gone, assuming that They refers to some form of animal life. The point is that the contraction is used without a precise conscious awareness of an underlying equivalent. Similarly, one of the main reasons why the question of choosing bewteen shall and will has become so academic is that we seldom use either shall or will. Does I'll see you tomorrow mean I will see you tomorrow or I shall see you tomorrow? Does it mean either one? It seems to be enjoying a perfectly satisfactory life of its own.

The expression you'd better (He'd better, we'd better) is very interesting. Is there a parallel uncontracted form? An average educated response might relate You'd better go to You had better go. But this is strange, because in modern English had is felt to be past, and nowhere else is it followed by an unmarked infinitive. On the other hand, You would better go is very jarring. And notice that the expression is often reduced to You better go, which would indicate that we no longer relate the contraction to a functional verb form at all.

If asked to expand I'd rather go, some of us might again hesitate between had and would. Would is certainly more probable, as in the case of people who would rather fight than switch. Nevertheless, had sounds acceptable:

I had rather not.

I had rather lose my life than my honor.

Does anyone find these examples unacceptable as possibilities in some dialects of English? If not, then we may reasonably regard I would rather and I had rather as examples of a sort of syntactic back formation from I'd rather, which must then be considered the primary form.

There's at least one syntactic situation which requires the use of contractions under any circumstances. That is the negative question: Didn't he meet you? Aren't they ready? Haven't you seen them? Pulpit oratory may turn up expressions like Did he not weep...? and imitators of imitative nineteenth-century verse may occasionally wonder, Did not the flowers do something or other, but these alternatives are as strange to modern English as the use of thee and thou. The contraction is the only construction here that doesn't violate the native speaker's feel for English syntax.

Throughout this paper the term "contraction" has been used for want of a better term. But the evidence indicates that it is a misnomer insofar as it suggests simply a phonological rearrangement of a longer string of morphemes with identical semantic and syntactic properties. The fact is that contractions and their

related uncontracted counterparts may have different derivational histories, different semantic contents and different syntactic functions. It has also been suggested that what we call contractions may really be the underlying forms of the language from which the uncontracted forms are derived and that many common opinions about and attitudes toward contractions are traceable to orthographic conventions.